

Abuse Case Has New Defendant

TR D MAY 31 1962

WALNUT CREEK — Ron-
nie Hicks today was named
as a defendant in the alleged
mistreatment of young stu-
dents at Mrs. Eileen Han-
son's Stagg Manor School for
the Mentally Retarded at Dan-
ville.

Hicks is to be arraigned on
the complaint issued by the
district attorney's office to-
morrow at 9 a.m. in Walnut
Creek Municipal Court.

Mrs. Hanson, Hick's moth-
er-i -law, was arrested on
March 27 on charges of ne-
glecting and abusing children
in the home, following an in-
vestigation by county and
state authorities. She has
pleaded innocent to the ac-
cusations and faces trial
Wednesday in the Walnut
Creek court.

The decision to also charge
Hicks, said Deputy Dist. Atty.
William H i g h a m , followed
further investigation by the
district attorney's office.

Defendant Pleads Innocent In Stagg School Abuse Case

TR D JUN 1 - 1962

WALNUT CREEK — Ronald Lee Hicks, named as a second defendant in charges concerning alleged mistreatment of young students at the Stagg Manor School for Retarded in Danville, pleaded innocent at his arraignment in Walnut Creek Municipal Court this morning.

Hicks, 25, and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Eileen Hanson, who was named in the original charges, both appeared in court this morning with

their attorney Thomas F. McBride to hear reading of an amended complaint. Mrs. Hanson also has pleaded innocent.

Dep. Dist. Atty. William Higham said two more children have been added to the complaint which charges the defendants with neglect and abuse of several of their students.

A jury trial on the charge will begin Wednesday morning in Walnut Creek Municipal Court.

New Jury Panel Called in Pair's Child Cruelty Trial

TR D SEP 6 - 1962

WALNUT CREEK — Selection of a jury continued here today in Municipal Court for the trial of Mrs. Eileen Hanson and her son-in-law, Ronald L. Hicks, of Danville, on charges of mistreating students at a private school for retarded children.

The original panel of 59 potential jurors called for the case was exhausted after a full day of questioning yesterday to select the final 12.

Judge Betsy Fitzgerald Rahn closed yesterday with having another jury panel drawn, and to be served for

court appearance at 9:30 a.m. today.

Seventeen combined challenges still remain for the prosecution, represented by Deputy Dist. Atty. William R. Higham; and defense attorneys Thomas F. McBride and Edward L. Merrill, representing Mrs. Hanson and Hicks, respectively.

Mrs. Hanson, operator of the Stagg Manor School on Kelly Lane, Danville, was arrested last March by county officials on a complaint charging abuse, neglect and mistreatment of several per-

Oakland Tribune 17
Thurs., Sept. 6, 1962 DC

sons of varying ages at the school.

Hicks was named later as co-defendant in an amended complaint. The pair have denied all charges.

The State Department of Mental Hygiene also has moved for revocation of Mrs. Hanson's license to operate the school, on similar charges, but a hearing date on the latter action has been continued till later.

Remarks interpolated at various times by attorneys during yesterday's prospective jury selection indicated the trial may extend over two or three weeks.

Attorney Charges Elements of Sadism

WALNUT CREEK — Presentation of the prosecution's case against two defendants charged with mistreating retarded children in a Danville private boarding school continued today with the testimony of a mother.

The hearing of witnesses got under way in Walnut Creek Municipal Court yesterday after a day and a half taken to select the jury of four men and eight women.

Defendants are Mrs. Eileen Hanson, operator of the Stagg Manor School, and her son-in-law, Ronald Hicks, both of whom pleaded innocent to a Contra Costa Sheriff's Office complaint last March accusing them of abuse, neglect and mistreatment of children left in the school's care.

JURY TRIAL ASKED

Defendants requested the jury trial.

Dept. Dist. Atty. William R. Higham, in his opening statement to the jury yesterday, said he planned to call a number of parents, staff people, doctors, psychologists and others as witnesses, plus some of the school inmates themselves if they can be legally qualified.

At one point, Higham charged "There are actually elements of sadism involved on the part of the defendants."

Defense attorneys Thomas F. McBride and Edward L. Merrill withheld opening statements until presentation of their cases.

SON WAS INMATE

Mrs. Erma L. Drummond of Los Gatos, whose son was a former occupant of the school until she removed him last February, testified yesterday she had found the school "run down," her son in an "increasingly dirty condition" and that his feet were frostbitten when she took him home for a Christmas visit last December.

She testified further that appointments with an orthodontist for his dental care had been neglected by Mrs. Hanson, and that diet arrangements for her son, who was prone to overweight, went from one extreme to the other, resulting in his becoming underweight. She said she finally removed him from the school's care on doctor's orders.

McBride, on cross examination, sought to show that Mrs. Hanson was fully cooperative with Mrs. Drummond in care of the latter's son, and that dissatisfactions which arose over the child's management were the result of difficulties inherent in caring for a retarded child.

Testimony Of Welfare Worker Hit

TR 0 SEP 8 - 1962

WALNUT CREEK — Legal wrangles over the admissibility and applicability of evidence marked the second day of testimony yesterday in the jury trial of two persons charged with mistreating retarded children in a private boarding school in Danville.

Municipal Judge Betsy F. Rahn allowed afternoon testimony by Mrs. Catherine Rollins, social worker with the Santa Clara County Welfare Department, to resume only after a near hour-long legal debate in her chambers with attorneys and principals in the case.

CONFIDENTIAL FILES

The issue was admissibility of evidence from confidential files with which Mrs. Rollins was refreshing her memory.

Attorney Edward L. Merrill, representing Ronald L. Hicks, co-defendant with his mother-in-law, Mrs. Eileen Hanson, operator of the Stagg Manor School, objected several times yesterday that evidence applying only to Mrs. Hanson should not be construed as relating to Hicks in the minds of jurors.

The trial was recessed until Wednesday before completion of direct examination of another prosecution witness, John Barr, supervising consultant with the California Department of Mental Hygiene.

TESTIMONY

Mrs. Rollins' attempts to testify regarding alleged "substandard" conditions at the boarding school met with frequent objections from defense attorneys.

Barr, who said his department oversees the operation and standards of some 400 private boarding schools for the mentally ill and retarded, testified he had made a survey last August at the home operated by Mrs. Hanson, and made an unannounced visit in February after receiving "serious reports."

Barr said he found the home was not up to state standards in the matter of cleanliness, sanitation, amount of food on hand per patient, the content of medical records and building maintenance.

Wrangles at 'Mistreatment' Trial

WALNUT CREEK — The jury trial of two defendants charged with mistreating inmates at a private school for the retarded plodded into its fifth day today with renewed verbal wrangles between opposing attorneys.

Only five witnesses have testified up till this morning. In the high misdemeanor complaint filed by Contra Costa County against Mrs. Eileen Hanson, operator of the Stagg Manor School in Danville, and her son-in-law, Ronald Hicks,

Deputy Dist. Atty. William R. Higham and Mrs. Hanson's attorney, Thomas F. McBride, each charged the other with

"misconduct" yesterday and at one point became so embroiled in verbal argument during witness John Barr's testimony, they brought a gavel-banging admonition from Walnut Creek Municipal Court Judge Betsy F. Rahn. Barr, a representative of the Bureau of Private Institu-

tions, State Department of Mental Hygiene, had been testifying concerning his findings on visits to Stagg Manor last February and in August, 1961.

McBride characterized Barr as a "hostile witness" and

said he had a right to know what was in reports on Barr's earlier visits. The state also has a hearing pending on the possible revocation of Mrs. Hanson's license.

Barr, in testimony yesterday, also added he did not be-

lieve the supervision at Stagg Manor was adequate for the number of people he found there.

Other witnesses yesterday were Dr. Richard Finner from Sonoma; Mrs. Ida Glasper, the Stagg Manor cook; and Mrs. Victoria Rabbiosa

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of Chowchilla, mother of one of the children formerly in the school.

Mrs. Rabbiosi said her son had suffered weight losses and fungus on his hands, both conditions clearing up after his removal from the school.

3 Testify

At Hanson

TR D SEP 21 1962

Jury Trial

WALNUT CREEK — The prolonged trial of two defendants for alleged mistreatment of young charges at Stagg Manor School, Danville, resumed a half hour earlier here today after restive jurors sought a speedup in procedure.

Among witnesses yesterday were the mother of a former student at the boarding school for retarded children and adults operated by Mrs. Eileen Hanson, and two former housekeeper-cooks at the school once employed there only briefly.

Mrs. Hanson is principal defendant in the jury trial. The mother related weight loss by her child.

A former housemother-cook was called by the prosecution as a corroborating witness to the condition of a student reportedly whipped with a belt by co-defendant Ronald Hicks.

She said she found the student bleeding and bruised after Hicks left his room.

Hicks' attorney, Edward L. Merrill, began laying a foundation for impeachment in rigorous cross examination, presumably on the basis of his contention that the witness had made conflicting statements to others as to what she actually saw and did.

3 Testify In Hanson Jury Trial

TR D SEP 25 1962

WALNUT CREEK — With a few more witnesses yet to be called, the prosecution may rest its case this week in the jury trial of two defendants charged with mistreatment of children at Stagg Manor School for the retarded.

Yesterday's testimony included that of a county sanitarian, a deputy sheriff, and Mrs. Florence Drummond, sheriff's juvenile control officer.

The latter was arresting officer in the county complaint naming Mrs. Eileen Hanson, operator of the Danville school, as defendant. Mrs. Hanson's son-in-law, Ronald Hicks, subsequently was named a co-defendant.

A belt allegedly used to beat children in disciplinary actions at the school was offered in evidence by the prosecution.

Mrs. Drummond acknowledged under cross examination that she previously had advised several parents that the Stagg Manor School was under investigation by both the county and state and that she suggested to parents to take the students home for visits.

Mrs. Hanson's attorney, Thomas McBride, made it a point to note that Mrs. Drummond is under temporary court injunction now to refrain from interfering with the school's operation.

Prosecution Rests In Child Home Case

TR D OCT 4 - 1962

WALNUT CREEK — The prosecution finally rested its case yesterday in the trial of Mrs. Eileen Hanson and her son-in-law, Ronald Hicks. They are accused of mistreatment of students at the Stagg Manor School for the retarded at Danville.

Except for some recess days, the trial has been under way in Walnut Creek Municipal Court since Sept. 5.

Deputy Dist. Atty. William Higham rested the prosecution's case about noon. The prosecution has been painting a picture of poor nutrition, poor sanitation, and occasional beatings of students at the school.

Mrs. Hanson's attorney, Thomas McBride, led off by calling the registrar of San Francisco State College in an attempt to discredit testimony given by a prosecution witness, Mrs. Marguerite Cone, former teacher at Stagg Manor, earlier in the trial.

During her testimony, Mrs. Cone had said she was a graduate of San Francisco State and received a BA degree.

McBride's witness said college records showed Mrs. Cone as a student but did not reflect that she had completed graduation, nor received the degree.

Attempts by McBride to recall Mrs. Cone from her Danville home to reappear in court were delayed when she

could not be reached immediately.

McBride also called Mr. and Mrs. Everet T. Shaver, high school teachers at Ione, who have a son still enrolled at Stagg Manor. Mrs. Shaver said her son has been happy at the school, that he likes the Hanson family, that he has been well fed and that the home is kept immaculate.

McBride also called four different tradespeople who related favorable impressions of Stagg Manor.

Defendant In School Case Heard

TRD OCT 6 - 1962

WALNUT CREEK — Mrs. Eileen Hanson, principal defendant in the Stagg Manor School jury trial over alleged mistreatment of children, took the witness stand in her own defense yesterday.

Questioned by her attorney, Thomas McBride, she calmly related her methods of conducting the school, caring for the children, teaching them "good manners" and added that some of the sanitation problems brought out by the prosecution were the result of a temporary septic tank failure which she tried to remedy immediately.

The defense in early testimony elicited information that 21 acres of the Ethelwyn Watts estate, which encircles the three-acre Stagg Manor School site at Danville, had been sold for \$83,206 and recorded by title insurance as of Jan. 25, 1962.

One of the three "holding" principals was named as J. Stephen Casalina, an Oakland attorney. Yesterday, McBride sought to have Casalina brought into court to testify but was advised by telephone that Casalina would refuse to divulge the principal parties of interest in the land transaction, even if subpoenaed.

Recognizing the attorney-client relationship, prosecutor William Higham, McBride, and attorney Edward Merrill, representing co-defendant Ronald Hicks, all stipulated that Casalina would not be called.

Indications were that the trial, under way since Sept. 5, may go to the jury for decision about mid-week.

End Near

In Record

Jury Trial

TR D OCT 9 - 1962

WALNUT CREEK — The longest Municipal Court jury trial in Contra Costa history is expected to end this week as eight women and four men deliberate charges of mistreatment of m e n t a l l y-retarded children at a privately-operated home in Alamo.

E i g h t witnesses testified yesterday, bring to more than 50 the total heard in 14 court days since Sept. 5.

Judge Betsy Rahn, whose calendar today was confined to auto traffic cases, told the jurors to anticipate hearing "rebuttal witnesses if any" tomorrow and taking the case under submission Thursday.

Mrs. Eileen Hanson, accused of neglect and mistreatment of her charges at Stagg Manor boarding home, has denied guilt. She said yesterday she spanked one boy—a habitual runaway—but did not hurt him.

Her son-in-law, Ronald Hicks, also accused of mistreating the children, said he was innocent.

Hicks testified yesterday he "shook a broom" at one boy who had seriously bitten another. He also said he gave a verbal dressing-down to a runaway in a closed room which caused the child to cry. Earlier in the trial, Mrs. Minnie Hankin, an employe at the home, said she had heard a beating inflicted.

Mrs. Hanson, whose illness delayed part of the trial, has used a wheel chair in court.

Jury Finds Hanson

TRD OCT 12 1962
Guilty

WALNUT CREEK — Mrs. Eileen Hanson and her son-in-law, Ronald Hicks, were convicted yesterday of mistreating mentally retarded children in her Stag Manor boarding home at Danville.

After 16 days of trial, the jury of eight women and four men deliberated five hours before returning with their findings against the pair.

Mrs. Hanson was found guilty on two counts of neglect and mistreatment of children in her charge, and Hicks on one count of mistreatment.

Ironically, the verdict came on the very day Mrs. Hick's marked her 54th birthday.

She will be sentenced Oct. 19 by Municipal Judge Betsy FitzGerald Rahn.

Hicks, however, was sentenced immediately after discharge of the jury, Judge Rahn placing him on probation for a year and fining him \$52.50.

During the 16 days of trial—the longest before a jury in municipal court history in this county—heard a succession of witnesses for and against Mrs. Hicks. Some praised her operation of the home for mentally retarded children, while others said some of her charges were mistreated and underfed.

Defense attorneys Thomas McBride and Ted Merrill moved immediately for a new trial, a plea which was denied by Judge Rahn.

Mrs. Hanson Fined \$525 In Home Case

WALNUT CREEK — Mrs. Eileen Hanson, who was convicted last week of mistreating mentally retarded children at her Stagg Manor boarding home in Danville, has been placed on three years probation and fined \$525.

Her son-in-law, Ronald Hicks, found guilty during the 6-day jury trial on one count of mistreatment, was placed on probation for one year and fined \$52.50.

The terms of probation, imposed yesterday by Walnut Creek Municipal Judge Betsy FitzGerald Rahn, call for Mrs. Hanson to cooperate in every way with Contra Costa County Health Officer Dr. H. L. Blum in the operation of the home.

Both Hicks and Mrs. Hanson are to comport themselves in "general good behavior."

A hearing before state authorities to determine whether Mrs. Hanson shall retain her license to operate Stagg Manor will be held Dec. 3.